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Northern Region News

Issue #5

Special Edition

June 1, 1989

"Pilot" 1989

by Janet McBride, Forester, Gardiner Ranger District, Gallatin National Forest

This newsletter is dedicated to all of the employees in Region One that make the pilot project worthwhile, and all the folks that sent in articles that made this newsletter informational as well as fun.

Forests were asked to send in samples of the many excellent pilot ideas submitted on their Forest. Limited by space, we had to select only a few of these samples for inclusion in the newsletter--but worked towards a smorgasbord approach. Scattered throughout this newsletter is a rich variety of creative proposals that, hopefully, will spark the imagination of the readers.

WHAT IS THE PILOT FOREST PROJECT?

There are several misconceptions about the pilot Forest program. A lot of folks have heard the name but are not exactly sure what it is, or why it was established. More importantly, however, is the idea that pilot suggestions must be high powered, big money savers. This myth has stifled and prevented the materialization of many excellent ideas. In an attempt to remove some of the fallacies surrounding the project, a brief history:

The National Pilot Program was established in 1985 and grew out of a 1985 Forest Service study to measure organizational effectiveness. Results of that study indicated that the Forest Service did not seem to foster entrepreneurship and creativity. One reason: "Our people are buried in red tape." The pilot program was created to remove these barriers, and to allow employees to devise and explore new, creative ways of doing business and improve employees' quality of work life.

The initial pilot program began with four units participating—three national forests and one research station. On October 1, 1987, the pilot test was expanded to include all of Region One. There were seven basic guidelines for the original national pilot test experiment units:

1. Tighten up negotiation of priorities, output targets, and objectives, so there is a good understanding of the job to be done.
2. Give maximum flexibility in how to get the job done, while staying within legal and basic policy bounds.
3. Budgets were to be given as lump sum dollars instead of the 55 line items as in the past.
4. Control over staffing and personnel ceilings was eliminated.
5. Units could keep any savings to do additional high-priority work.
6. There is no such thing as failure--only learning experiences, with the worst possible outcome being "we tried out an idea, it didn't work out, and we're wiser because of it."
7. It was truly a "bottom-up" approach to change. Test units were in charge. They could go at their own pace.

The Pilot Program has improved the way we do business. Following are a few of the excellent examples submitted by Northern Region Forests.

New Training on several of the Forests . . .

■ Folks on the LOLO NF are improving their wildland skills at the Ninemile Wildlands Training Center (NWTC). This program was set up under the pilot test program and has been a huge success. Employees new to wildland projects can come to the center for training. Courses taught at the center include: Restoration of historic structures, trail management, horsemanship, stock packing, and use and care of primitive tools. Several of the instructors are selected from Forest Service employees who have developed a reputation from their peers as the best in their field. Others are drawn from outside agencies and from private businesses. This pilot project has greatly improved the skills of Forest Service employees, and in turn, improved efficiency, safety, creativity, and the final results of these projects.



Above: Jim Larkin, Livingston District, Gallatin NF, and Vern Wooley, Stevensville District, Bitterroot NF, learn to balance the load at Ninemile Ranger Station's packer school. Left: "Loading the manties" at Ninemile's packer school.



■ The DEERLODGE NF is developing an image of being "the great negotiator." This image was the result of a collaborative (to cooperate treasonably, as with an enemy occupying one's country!) negotiations process, tried and tested during Forest Planning. Consequently, the Intermountain Forest Industry Association and the National Wildlife Federation withdrew appeals to the Forest Plan. The negotiations have been so successful, that additional training in collaborative negotiations are scheduled for November, 1989. If you can say it, you can come!!!

■ The LEWIS AND CLARK NF has increased employee safety by creating a motorcycle training course. This course was designed in cooperation with Malmstrom Air Force Base and will provide nationally accredited motorcycle training to employees on the Forest.

Employee Wellness Programs . . .

■ When tragedy strikes it is never a happy thing. But several audacious folks on the **IDAHO PANHANDLE NF's** are returning to work after permanently disabling accidents. Under a pilot proposal, 11 long-term injured workers were identified. With the firm resolve of the Forest Management Team, managers and supervisors created or modified positions and made job offers to 10 of the 11 workers. So far in FY '89, all 10 of these employees have been placed in positions that greatly benefit the Forest Service and keep worker's spirits high.

■ Stress can pile on, just like fixin's on a sandwich. For those who have extremely busy lives, the last thing needed is stress created from a long commute -- not to mention the extra bucks needed to maintain a vehicle. Folks on the Yaak Ranger District, **KOOTENAI NF**, faced just such a problem. Most, if not all, employees lived in Troy or Libby -- a minimum 25 mile one-way commute. With coaxing from a pilot suggestion, the **KOOTENAI NF** combined the Yaak and the Troy Ranger Districts, eliminating the 25 mile commute, and saving around \$300,000 annually. The reduction in mileage has also paid off by increasing the District's ability to hire and recruit new employees!

■ Parking at the Federal building in Helena has never been easy; in fact, some would say, "it's a downright challenge!" Too often when the District folks visit the **HELENA NF** Supervisor's Office, finding a parking place is impossible! So they end up parking in the city's paid parking lots. By having Helena city parking tokens available now at all District offices, the problem of the employee not having change or having to pay for parking themselves is alleviated.

■ How many times have your children asked, "Daddy/Mommy, just what do you do at work?" Sometimes we assume from conversations around the house that the family naturally knows what your job is. But seldom do we go beyond our assumptions or really even put a value on our family knowing of our jobs. Several folks on the **HELENA NF** proposed a "Kids' Day at Work" which was approved under the pilot program. Employees took advantage of being able to share what goes on "behind the scenes" in our national forests, whether the jobs were in the office or right out there in the national forest. Kids went away with more understanding of where their folks were during the day, and why they sometimes were worn out when they got home and/or had to work late. All in all it appears to have been a great success.

combined with improved public service . . .

■ How many times have you been speaking with a receptionist, only to be interrupted (several times) by the phone? Or better still, how many times have you waited several minutes just to get a response? The **NEZ PERCE NF** has improved public responsiveness by removing the telephone switchboard from the front office. At the same time, they designed the entire front office to make visitors feel welcome and at ease.

■ The caring attitude on the **NEZ PERCE NF** is also prevalent in dedication to employee well-being programs. While several units only give lip service to these programs, the **NEZ PERCE NF** has tried and been successful in several. Some of these accomplishments include the opportunity for employees to rate their supervisor on supervision qualities at performance rating time, establishing a community daycare center on the Elk City Ranger District, and combining all employee-related plans (i.e. Equal Employment Opportunity, Alcoholics Anonymous, Quality of Worklife) into one dynamic "What's In It For Me" plan. The Forest has also implemented a recognition program for the "small" accomplishments both on and off the job, i.e. "hero" badges, "excellence" pins, etc., to let employees know they are appreciated!

■ Improving visitor information is top priority on the **LEWIS AND CLARK NF**. Public access routes on the 1988 Travel Plan maps have been highlighted. The intent is to increase the public's awareness of access to National Forest System lands. Not enough time has passed to determine if this was accomplished. However, this information has aided receptionists and other Forest Service personnel to give accurate access information to inquiring publics.

■ What do you say when Mr./Mrs. general public states, "The Forest Service does nothing." Instead of defending their position with off-the-cuff thoughts, the **REGIONAL OFFICE** Wildlife and Fisheries shop has developed a prospectus for the public. Employees generally do a pretty poor job of telling the public what the Forest Service is doing on their public land. This prospectus details exact programs for all resources in Region One-- costs, accomplishments, etc. In addition, the prospectus can be used as an overview when speaking to user groups, inter-Region communication, etc.

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Many units in Region One have used the principles of cost-sharing to accomplish otherwise impossible tasks.

■ Soon after the fires were controlled late last fall, the Darby Ranger District on the **BITTERROOT NF** geared up to sell a timber salvage sale. The sale had to be prepared, sold and harvested within a nine-month period to protect the value of the timber. Since all of the seasonal crews had already been terminated for the season, employees from the Stoltz lumber mill volunteered their time to help with the on-the-ground work associated with designing and marking the sale. Their assistance enabled the District to get the sale advertised on schedule.

■ Volunteer help was also used by the **BITTERROOT NF** to reconstruct the Blodgett Trail bridge. In a partnership agreement between Stevensville Ranger District, the Bitterroot Back Country Horsemen, Montana Outfitters and Guides Association, and the U.S. Navy Seabees, the groups volunteered to pack in materials by horse and mule strings, and to complete reconstruction of the bridge.

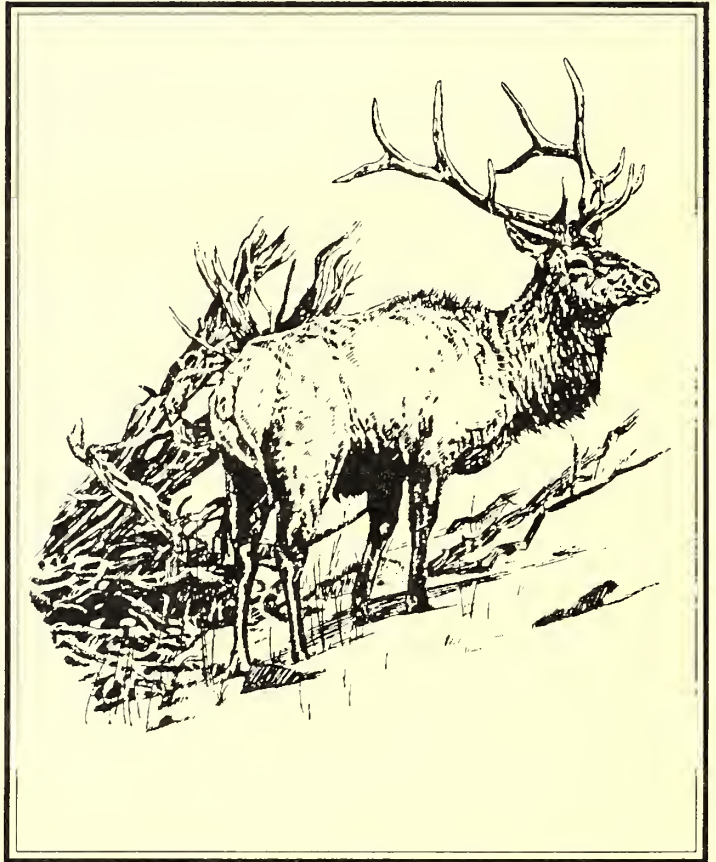
■ Need some color in your life? Employees from the **REGIONAL OFFICE** have developed a method to reduce costs in printing brochures. In the past, the cost of color brochures were often prohibitive. Under a cost-share program, a cooperator can sign a participating agreement with the government and print the brochures through their organization. Costs are either shared or completely covered by cooperators. Although cost-share is not new, using the idea for publications is relatively new. This gives us the opportunity to get more publications out.

Have you ever considered cost-sharing between Forest Service units?

■ The **FLATHEAD NF** is working toward the implementation of a Central Travel Schedule. When folks from either the same unit or different units need to go to the S.O., R.O., etc., they can pick each other up on the way. When a trip is planned, a program coordinator would be notified and corresponding trips paired up. This is an excellent gas saver, reduces vehicle maintenance, and is a great alternative for those who hate to drive!

■ Remember those childhood wish lists you created at Christmas time? The **FLATHEAD NF** has incorporated the same idea into Project Wish List. Units not able to complete projects due to various constraints (time, money, manpower, etc.), can place these projects on the Forest "Wish List." Throughout the year, Forest Service volunteers are rounded up and the project completed. The program increases comradery, knowledge of other areas on the Forest, and reduces costs.

■ Talk is Cheap! But due to some innovative thinking in the **REGIONAL OFFICE**, it has paid off big. The wildlife department in the R.O. organized a writer's tour, inviting journalists from Outdoor Life, Hunting, the Missoulian newspaper, the Lewiston Tribune, and several others. The tour group visited several Forest Service project areas and discussed integrated resource management with the writers. Topics included old growth management, timber sales and how we coordinate wildlife management with the sale program, threatened and endangered species programs, etc. The idea has paid off by increasing public awareness of Forest Service programs and by reducing advertisement costs.



■ The demand for viewing wildlife is on the increase. In light of this fact, the Forest Service has initiated a cost-share agreement with several cooperators to develop a Montana Wildlife Viewing Guide. At 1/4 million dollars, the Forest Service could hardly cover the costs. But by inviting the Bureau of Land Management, Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Montana Tourist Bureau, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of State Lands, National Park Service, and Defenders of Wildlife to join in the effort, the project is now well underway.

The GALLATIN NF was one of the four original 'national' units selected to test the pilot program in 1985. After four years of trial and error, they contributed the following ideas:

"Being one of the original Pilot Forests has been exciting, challenging, and definitely a learning experience! This is one program that is designed for each and every individual. It can be used as a tool to change WO and RO policy, bureaucratic procedures, and various programs and items that are "sore" spots for individuals.

"It is our perspective that the counting of ideas or the "big impact ideas" are not the true measures of a successful pilot program (or in our case indicators of successful long-term fundamental changes in our organizational culture). Creating an environment that promotes innovation, risk-taking, and self-motivation, and builds employee self-esteem, were the real objectives of the Gallatin Pilot Program. Under this environment, many of the true successes never take the form of a written idea that is processed through a steering committee. It is our objective that people, given the opportunity, will find better ways of doing things and identify those things that no longer need to be done.

"A constant challenge to the pilot effort is to establish a process for submitting ideas that is simple and easy to use by all employees. We have had several brainstorming sessions on the irony of creating a bureaucratic process for fostering creativity—keeping the system simple. We continually modify our approach for formal idea generation and implementation. The catalysts for idea generation are 'mini teams' made up by each management unit. Only the Forest Supervisor can disapprove an idea.

"Some other valuable experiences that we learned in our pilot

experience are:

--**Accepting Failure:** One of the original pilot messages was '...push the outside limits of our experiences and don't be afraid of some failures.' If you haven't failed with some of your programs, you probably are not working towards the outer limits which are targeted by implementing the pilot program.

--**Celebrating Success:** Our work force discovered that the vast majority of the pilot proposals were within Forest Supervisor authority to implement. Rather than celebrate the role of the pilot program in this realization, the pilot was viewed as being superfluous by many employees on the Forest.

--**Changing What Others Did:** Many formal pilot ideas were targeted at what others did, and not personal. Employees-managers, found it difficult to implement proposals that they did not suggest. The energy and desire for change was not present. Management must create an atmosphere of trust—where an individual can openly admit that there may be ways to improve the way 'I' can do my job.

--**Unrealistic Expectations:** Initial personal expectations were not met. Many of our employees (including many of our seasonal employees) left the first all-hands pilot meeting with unrealistic expectations. When these high expectations crashed, head-on into cold, hard reality, there were many who dropped out of participating in the pilot effort.

--**Timely Feedback:** Pilot ideas that employees get the most gratification from are those that are implemented immediately."

When a proposal doesn't work the first time, sometimes a few minor revisions and a dose of perseverance will set the idea into action. . .

For years, comedians have made jokes at the government for being buried under layers of paperwork. The resource department of the CLEARWATER NF literally took this to heart and tackled it with a pilot proposal. The U.S. Department of Agriculture sends out a monthly newsletter to all USDA employees. Copies were sent to each employee and could easily be reduced by routing newsletters effectively. The CLEARWATER NF sent in a suggestion to reduce the number of newsletters received in the Northern Region

by 54%. Initially, this request was met with rejection-- "we don't have any control over the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture." The resource section persevered, resubmitted the idea as a pilot proposal, solicited a little more interest, and the suggestion was approved. The Regional Forester has sent a letter to the Chief suggesting the rest of the Forest Service adopt the idea and help the USDA cash in on the savings.

The FLATHEAD NF sent in a similar suggestion.

The majority of the Forests have formed Pilot committees and developed unique strategies to encourage employees, and breathe life into the program.

■ The BEAVERHEAD NF Pilot Committee is going to invite their employees to meet with them, explain their job, and make suggestions for improvement. Additionally, they think there are many other non-functional areas that could be looked at on a case by case basis to determine if there is room for improvement. They expect this to speed things up considerably and hopefully do it in an orderly manner. They are hoping to continue to get those "bright new ideas," but rather than waiting for that moment of creativity, they see the opportunity to force the process.

■ The HELENA NF became a Pilot Forest on November 23, 1987. They used this freedom to "discover" a new way of doing business and had a good time in the process. Initially, they created a theme titled "Project Discovery." Most all the folks seemed jazzed up by the program and proposals poured in. They realized that there were many people out there who care deeply about the jobs they perform and the place in which they work. They wanted to make the HELENA NF an even better place to work. Within the past 1 1/2 years, over 120 ideas have been submitted, and over 80% approved!!! How's that for risk-taking?

The Pilot Program has allowed new creativity to pervade the way we manage resources.

■ The KOOTENAI NF has a mushrooming problem. The 1988 fires created an environment ideal for the growth of morels . . . a delicacy to some, a fungi to others. Morel production in other countries is at an all-time low, creating a huge escalation in the price. Commercial buyers are looking to our national forests to replenish their rapidly depleting stock. Employees

on the KOOTENAI NF were first to foresee possible damage to resources if pickers were allowed to run-a-muck. So . . . under the pilot program, they have set up charge permits for these treasures. Commercial cost is set at a steep \$500.00, private use-\$5.00. Hopefully, these permits will give the Forest some control over pickers and protection of resources.



■ Everything is coming up orchids on the LEWIS AND CLARK NF. Two plant species on the USDA Regional Forester's Sensitive Plant list: the Little Round-leaved Orchis and the Sparrow's Egg Lady's Slipper, have been found throughout the LEWIS AND CLARK NF. With a go-ahead from the pilot test committee, two exclosures will be constructed around key orchid populations located on range allotments on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District. Livestock tend to congregate in these two areas during the hot summer days and trample and graze on the Sparrow's Egg Lady's Slipper. Hopefully this will reduce cattle munching and trampling, and protect these species for future generations.

■ Help may be on the way!! The Little Missouri National Grasslands is partially funded through special use range receipts. But a few curious employees on the CUSTER NF wondered why funds could not be contributed from other special use receipts. Applicable laws were reviewed including Title 3 of the Bankhead Jones Act. None of these laws appeared to dispute the partial use of any special use receipts on the National Grasslands. Mustering up some initiative, these employees submitted a proposal to use portions of all special use permits to carry out plans stated in their approved Forest Plan. The jury is still out, but the Forest is hopeful.



Several Administrative changes have occurred over the past 4 1/2 years due to the excellent suggestions sent in by employees. Just take a look at these samples!!

■ The **GALLATIN NF** has implemented several administrative changes. This includes the approval of overtime authorization on the T & A worksheet, elimination of approval for organizational changes, and determining standard outfitter fees by service days.

Improving organizational flexibility on individual units has increased a unit's ability to be dynamic and responsive to existing workloads and issues. Units no longer need higher approval to sign on a new employee. If the position is justified, and the dollars available, the job can be filled. Rangers continue to receive more authority to run their Districts. Decisions and permit authorizations for grazing, special uses etc., are now made on-the-ground, which increases public service.

■ The **DEERLODGE NF** reviewed the existing delegation of authority on the Forest, and streamlined the bureaucratic process. Decisions that could be made on the District were sent down. Unnecessary reviews were completely eliminated. This has resulted in an organization that is more efficient, and more responsive to the public. Public service was carried one step further when a 1-800 number was suggested and established under the pilot for public recreation information.

■ The Forest Plan now drives the programming and budgeting process on the **CLEARWATER NF**. This pilot idea has been a giant improvement from the days when programming and budgeting dictated adherence to the Forest Plan. The forest supervisor, administrative officer, and planning staff conceptualized a process and set objectives and parameters. Detailed steps were created by the budget and planning folks and the Forest's leadership team. The process was difficult and caused the groups to stretch and create ideas far from traditional approaches.

Resource programs for the next nine years were strategized, and Districts provided program direction to the district rangers in a totally different way. When the Forest leadership team went to assemble a final program, it struggled with how to assess target accomplishments and how to set priorities. It was extremely difficult to prioritize work without asking how much money had been allocated to do certain kinds of work...but, the team persevered! Today they have a new program, not yet perfect, but much more suitable to their needs.

■ On the money saving side, the **NEZ PERCE NF** disaggregated the administrative officer functions among key staff officers; this is going into the fourth year with excellent results.

■ Early this spring the **LEWIS AND CLARK NF** advertised for volunteers in the Western Horseman Magazine and received 35+ applications, ranging in age from 18 to 65! How's that for response?

■ Recently the **KOOTENAI NF** decided to move all three of their zone engineering units out of leased space and next to the Districts they serve. This has reduced costs and provided more readily available information for the Districts.

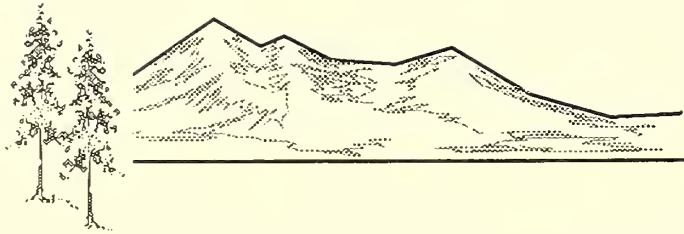


Wise River Ranger District employees enroute to Lincoln District.

■ It's been almost a year now since the Wise River District of the **BEAVERHEAD NF** packed up their entire crew and headed for the Lincoln District of the **HELENA NF**. The object of this two-day visit was to establish an information exchange. Several improvements occurred as a result. However, in the long run the big gains were in personal friendships made, and the continuing dialogue that was established.

■ With over 45 employees receiving and sending calls, the receptionist at the **CUSTER NF** Supervisor's Office is worked extremely hard. All incoming and outgoing calls must go through the front desk, leaving the receptionist with little time for other jobs. Some watchful, sympathetic employees submitted an idea to change the phone system to a direct line. Incoming and outgoing calls can now be dialed direct, eliminating the need for a full-time receptionist.

■ This idea has not been approved yet, but employees on the **HELENA NF** are giving it a good try! An employee completes a project with a cost savings. If the job is well done and the savings legitimate, the employee can receive an incentive award based on the savings. For example: A person has a 1,000-acre burning target with a planned cost of \$25,000. The project was completed for \$10,000, leaving \$15,000 savings. As an incentive, the employee could receive a 1% bonus or \$150.00. A committee was appointed by the Project Discovery Core Team in January, 1989, to discuss development of a Forest incentive program. A proposal is now being explored which hopefully will clarify "gainsharing" and establish a Forest incentive program to better define the actual method.



The Leading Edge

by John Mumma, Regional Forester

The pilot program is alive and well!! Initiated in 1985, the program started out with great enthusiasm and a stream of exciting proposals. The rapidly growing number of challenge cost-share programs, with 37 partners in the Northern Region, is an example of what can happen under the open atmosphere of the pilot program. Most of these proposals were not "big ideas," but small, creative and innovative ideas that have added up over the past four years. Throughout the extreme fire season of 1988, the pilot program experienced an understandable slow-down, and program visibility was "smokey." In 1989, however, the pilot program will continue in the pursuit of excellence!!

It's important for all of you to understand that it's not the number of formal programs created that counts, but the ability to submit new ideas that can change the organization for the better.

With the pilot program, we have an open and healthy atmosphere which allows us the space to be more creative, and to do many things that we traditionally couldn't, or thought we couldn't, do. It gives us the room to take a chance, express our ideas, and make some changes. There is no such thing as an idea not worth being shared. If there is lack of cooperation on an immediate level, ideas can and should be sent up to the next highest level for consideration. We need to encourage and support one another, working together to make our organization lean on bureaucratic procedures and full of accomplishments.

I challenge you to take a look around you and come up with ideas that would improve your workplace or programs. Your ideas could benefit all of us, including the agency.

SO HOW DO I SUBMIT A PROPOSAL?

Submitting an idea is easy. Seek out those bureaucratic procedures that are restricting job accomplishment, and find ways to streamline and/or remove them. Ideas can be written on anything (which can be mailed). Some of the Forests have forms listed on the Data General, but these are not required; they are only an aid. Ideas should include a brief statement on current methods, the problem, and solution. There are two basic ground rules for ideas:

1) they must be legal, and 2) they must be within the constraints of the budget.

Normally, suggestions are submitted to your supervisor. However, if you prefer, they can be submitted by someone else in the office or to Bob Schrenk in the Regional Office. If desired, these ideas can remain confidential, or be reviewed by a specified individual or group of individuals.

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